

FYFE, N.R., TERPSTRA, J. and TOPS, P. (eds.) 2013. Centralizing forces? Comparative perspectives on contemporary police reform in northern and western Europe. The Hague: Eleven International Publishing [online]. Available from: <https://www.boomdenhaag.nl/en/webshop/centralizing-forces>

Centralizing forces? Comparative perspectives on contemporary police reform in northern and western Europe.

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2013

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INTRODUCTION: A 'TRANSFORMATIVE MOMENT IN POLICING'

Jan Terpstra and Nicholas R. Fyfe

States both old and new, across the developed and developing world, are undertaking police reforms to transform policing. Sometimes this is because the money has run out, sometimes because the government recognizes a need to rebuild the legitimacy of police forces tarnished by corruption and ineffectiveness. This is both an age of 'austerity' and reform. (Neyroud, 2012: 315)

Peter Neyroud's observations about how fundamental changes are currently re-shaping policing in many states across the globe could, at one level, be interpreted as the latest in a long history of claims about the 'transformation of policing' (Jones & Newburn, 2002). Bayley and Shearing (1996), for example, famously articulated the view in the mid-1990s that we were witnessing a 'watershed in the evolution' of crime control and law enforcement in the United States, Britain and Canada characterized by the pluralization of policing and the search for identity by the public police. Others contested this transformation thesis, arguing that it tended to exaggerate the degree of change and underplay the degree of continuity in policing systems (Jones & Newburn, 2002: 142). So is Neyroud's claim regarding a 'transformative moment in policing' any more credible than previous references to profound changes in policing systems? In this book we present evidence from northern and western Europe of significant reforms to the structure and organization of public police institutions, which indicates, if not a transformation, at least a fundamental set of changes to the relationships between police organizations, governments, and citizens. It is important at the outset, however, to emphasize that the types of police reform we are focused on relate to macro-level changes in the strategic development of police institutions that are orchestrated by the actions of governments and often linked to broad processes of social and economic restructuring that shape the environments in which police organizations operate. To draw on Jack Greene's (2012) metaphor of the sea, our focus is very much on the 'tides and currents of policing' (*i.e.* the institutional structures that are shaped by political, economic and social processes) rather than the 'eddies and whirlpools' of policing, exemplified by specific initiatives and interventions introduced by the police to deal with particular issues, such as tackling crime, responding to the threats of terrorism, or rebuilding relationships with local communities.

Although the ‘tides and currents’ and ‘eddies and whirlpools’ of policing are clearly interlinked, this is a helpful distinction when thinking about the analysis of police reform given that so much of the current research literature in this field focuses on the latter rather than the former. Savage (2007) in *Police Reform: Forces for Change*, for example, largely focuses on changes in methods and techniques of policing, such as the introduction of zero-tolerance tactics, the development of community policing and innovations in performance management. Similarly, in *Policing in Europe* (Verhage *et al.*, 2010), the focus is mainly on changes in the mechanisms of police cooperation, the practices of community-oriented policing (COP) and the expansion and challenges of plural policing. More recently, Manning’s (2010) analysis of ‘democratic policing in a changing world’ includes a whole chapter on police reform, but its focus is firmly on developments in community policing, problem-solving policing, hot-spots policing, and crime mapping. As Manning acknowledges, these reforms are essentially ‘tactical modifications in resource deployment’ (p. 155) and do not involve any fundamental reorganization of the police as an institution and its relationships with government.

While these types of police reform are all significant, it is important not to lose sight of the bigger picture in terms of macro-level changes in the structure, organization and governance of public police institutions. It is these macro-level changes in policing that are currently being played out in many countries in northern and western Europe that are explored in the contributions to this book. In this introductory chapter, we want to ‘set the scene’ by further clarifying the focus of this collection of essays by defining different types and dimensions of police reform. We then consider the background to police reform in northern and western Europe by disentangling the complex factors and processes that typically act as drivers for structural change. This then leads into a discussion of the importance of context dependency in understanding police reform and the challenges around evaluating the impacts and implications of change.

1.1 POLICE REFORM: TYPES AND DIMENSIONS

As the distinction between ‘tides and currents’ and ‘eddies and whirlpools’ indicates, the concept of police reform may refer to a range of very different processes and changes at different levels within the police organization. In this book police reform is understood as a change based on an explicit policy plan or legal measure. This does not imply that decisions about the reform and its implementation will follow the original plan exactly, given that in many cases reforms achieve only limited success and will be accompanied by all kinds of unintended effects and processes.

Two dimensions may be relevant to distinguish different types of police reform: the level of reform and its scope. With regard to the level of reform we

can differentiate between micro-, meso-, and macro-changes. The scope of reform runs from small-scale to more comprehensive forms. Both dimensions must be understood as a sliding scale between two poles. Combinations of different levels and different scopes are possible. Table 1.1 presents some examples of each of the conceivable combinations of level and scope.

Table 1.1 Examples of Different Types of Police Reform

Level of reform	Scope of reform	
	Small-scale	More comprehensive
Micro	Changes to procedures for obtaining views of citizens on local priorities or dealing with complaints	Introduction of community-oriented, problem-oriented or intelligence-led policing
Meso	Introduction of force-based Compstat-type accountability, crime mapping and hot spot policing	Introduction of national/regional quality and performance management systems
Macro	Introduction of benchmarking between police forces on factors like response times, detection rates, and citizen satisfaction	Changes to the organization, structures, governance and purpose of policing

Most of the police reforms that Bayley (2008) or Manning (2010) deal with in their analyses are at the operational (micro-) level and are also rather comprehensive. Examples are COP, problem-oriented policing (POP) or hot-spot policing. However, some of the reforms that both Bayley and Manning analyze are also related to the meso-level and are less broad in scope, such as Compstat or the introduction of innovative forms of external oversight of police activities.

This book concentrates on types of police reform at the macro-level, with a broad scope. This kind of police reform often involves changes in the structure of police organizations and/or in the relationship between government authorities and the police. In some cases this kind of system reform or system innovation may be restricted to legal, organizational, structural and/or financial aspects. In others, this kind of police reform may also reflect fundamental changes in underlying values and purposes of policing or may run parallel to the introduction and institutionalization of a new view of police work and/or the police mandate. For instance, in Belgium two years after the Octopus reform of 2001, it was decided (as a final element of this reform) that COP should be the legal framework for police work (see Chapter 5). In Scotland the reform programme has been used to articulate a new set of 'principles of policing' that emphasize community well-being and harm reduction as well as crime prevention (see Chapter 7).

It is often suggested that police reform is a discrete, one-off, linear process, occurring within a relatively short period of time, creating a radical innovation and a break with the past. This view of police reform is usually more a reflection of the dreams and hopes of policymakers than a realistic analysis of how

things are often going. In England and Wales, for example, the introduction of elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) was seen by the government as a radical change to police governance, yet only a very small number of people took the chance to vote, partly because many saw this as an unwarranted politicization of policing (see Chapter 6). Usually, police reform is much more complex. In some cases police reform may be intended to create a fundamental break with the past. However, even in those cases, change is often largely a matter of path dependency (Mahoney, 2000).

The reform itself may be highly contingent, taking place in a relatively open situation, with the opportunity to choose between several alternatives. In Scotland, for example, the government engaged in a public consultation exercise in which three different options for reform were presented: enhanced collaboration between the eight regional forces that existed prior to reform, the merger of those eight forces to create three or four larger forces, or the creation of a national police force (see Chapter 7). In general, though, the process and outcome of the reform depend greatly on a specific institutional and historical context. The consequence may be that the change is often more gradual, with greater continuity with the past than was originally imagined.

In addition, police reform is often a gradual, long-term process. It may take many years before there is enough political and social support for a proposed reform. The implementation of reform may also take a long time. In the process, the original plan and goals of the reform may be reinterpreted and amended many times, for example because support is needed from other actors, interest groups and coalitions. The result may be that not only may the outcome differ from the original reform plan, but also that the plan itself may change in many respects.

In many countries (such as Sweden, Finland, and the Netherlands) police reforms follow one after the other, often in relatively short periods of time. This is the more striking because each reform requires much in the way of resources and investments, from the governments, police leaders and police officers. As Wennström (Chapter 9) describes for Sweden, a subsequent wave of reform often seems to be more or less the direct result of serious flaws in the preceding reform: these flaws were often known, even when the reform was initiated. Similarly, Mouhanna (Chapter 2) concludes for France that police reform may be a continuous process, even a vicious circle.

This implies that police reform is generally not so much a rational-instrumental, goal-oriented process, but more a matter of ‘muddling through’, as Lindblom (1959) put it more than half a century ago. Instead of police reform as a radical, one-off break in history, in Brodeur’s (2005) view it is more a matter of a permanent reform process, of a *Trotsky in Blue* as he calls it (although usually without the revolutionary flavour). Most police reform is a combination of goal-oriented intentions and unintended – in some cases even contrary – effects, which may at first remain unnoticed. One of the most fascinating things about police reforms

is, in the words of Stenning and Shearing (2005: 168), "[T]he seemingly quite haphazard and unplanned, uncoordinated way in which they have most typically occurred". Instead of perceiving police reform in terms of a one-actor model that presents the reform as a singular, top-down process, it is better to analyze police reform as taking place in complex social configurations and (quasi-)political networks, dependent on changing power relations, shifting agendas and contrasting perspectives between the relevant actors. This applies not only to the decision process about police reform, but also to its implementation. In that phase, too, the conflicts, negotiations and reinterpretations of the reform may still be going on.

Police reform (in the meaning of system reform) may differ in regard to some dimensions. Examples of these dimensions are centralization as opposed to decentralization, concentration/deconcentration, scale increase/decrease, more power to central or local authorities, bureaucratization/professionalization, more emphasis on the three Es (economy, effectiveness and efficiency) or on other values (such as human rights, public accountability, justice or social equality). Police reforms may also differ with regard to the emphasis placed on its instrumental and symbolic aspects (Terpstra & Trommel, 2009).

Most of the police reforms analyzed in this book can be understood as forms of centralization, resulting in scale increase. In many cases (the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Scotland), this results in the creation of national police forces where a regionalized system used to exist. The only two jurisdictions that are exceptions here are Belgium and England and Wales. Although in Belgium there is currently some discussion of scale enlargement of the smaller local ('zonal') police forces, the resistance to the federal state is so strong, especially in the Flemish part of the country, that it seems unlikely that the country will have a national police force within the foreseeable future (Chapter 5). In England and Wales recent police reform also indicates strong political (although, interestingly, not police) opposition to merging or amalgamating the existing 43 forces, with the emphasis being on local policing, local steering and more local accountability (Chapter 6).

The reforms analyzed here can also be seen as mainly police-centric. Despite the fact that, during the past two decades, all these countries have been confronted with the rise of new forms of governance in the security field, increased pluralization of policing, a growth of private forms of security, and an increasing emphasis on multi-agency networks, most reforms deal solely with the police. It would seem that the police are still seen as the dominant agency in this field, which can be treated (and reformed) in isolation. As far as we can see, academic interest in the nodal governance approach to security and policing (Johnston & Shearing, 2003; Wood & Shearing, 2007) has had only a minimal impact on these reform policies.

What is also virtually absent in these reform strategies is explicit attention to the position of the public. This is quite remarkable given the increased political

and social attention of the past 20 years in many countries to issues such as the activation and responsabilization of citizens, citizen participation in security and policing, and democratization from below. Moreover, many of these reforms were also inspired by a (supposed) loss of citizens' trust in the police (in the Netherlands and Belgium, for example). However, these reforms do not afford any new space for the activation of citizens or citizen participation. England and Wales, with their introduction of more direct forms of local democracy and accountability, might be the exception here (Chapter 6).

Once again with the exception of England and Wales, most of these reforms are firmly embedded in a vertical, state-oriented vision. In some cases (such as the Netherlands) the goal of the reform even seems to be to create a greater emphasis on hierarchical relations in the governance of security and policing. This might represent a break with the recent past, when horizontal relations were viewed as more important. At present, it remains to be seen whether or not this will be a permanent change.

1.2 BACKGROUNDS TO POLICE REFORM

Opportunities for police reform usually arise only in specific circumstances. The taken-for-granted nature of institutions and their routine practices may create a 'self-reinforcing sequence' (Mahoney, 2000) or a shield against even the idea of fundamental change. This may be reinforced if the existing police system has a high level of legitimacy. As long as the police are perceived as a more or less 'sacred' institution, there may not be much room for a reform of the police organization, cuts in its budget, or curtailment of its independence. In such a context, even if it is recognized that the police have serious problems, they may not be defined in such a way as to justify fundamental police reform. Any fundamental change of the police system may even be unimaginable for a long time. In other cases, there may be proposals for reform, but the initiators will not succeed in placing them high up on the political agenda. But it is not only the weight of tradition and institutional stability that may be a significant impediment to radical change. The interests of powerful groups, both inside and outside the police, may create high levels of resistance, both hidden and overt, to police reform. As a result, proposals for reform may disappear from the public and political scene, in some cases to return after a couple of years in a somewhat modified form (cf. Savage, 2007).

At some point, this combination of institutional stagnation, taken-for-granted legitimacy and resistance may be broken through, affording opportunities for police reform. In the different European countries there are similar factors and processes that may contribute to such a breakthrough and to police reform. The combination of these factors and the way they are interpreted may differ, however. Reforms in different countries may be similar, even though the underlying opportunities and drivers may differ.

1.2.1 *Open Situation, Crisis or Disaster*

In many cases, police reform would not have occurred in the absence of an 'open' social and political situation, often the result of a serious crisis, scandal or disaster (Savage, 2007). This was clearly the case in Belgium in the second half of the 1990s, where several problems such as the Nijvel gang (or Brabant killers), the political terrorism of the CCC (Communist Combatant Cells) and the Dutroux affair created an atmosphere of unrest, political upheaval and a sense of crisis. Although the level of trust in the Belgium police was already low, now even more citizens lost confidence in the police and the criminal justice agencies. The Belgian state was in a serious crisis of legitimacy. The new social ('White') movement, a reaction to the Dutroux affair, demanded fundamental reforms of the police. In addition, the established political parties were already under considerable pressure owing to the electoral successes of right-wing political parties since 1991, especially in the Flemish part of the country. This created an open situation with the opportunity for a fundamental reform of the Belgian police, which had not been deemed possible in the years before (Chapter 5).

1.2.2 *General Social Changes and Circumstances*

Police reform must also be understood against the background of more general social, political, cultural and economic changes. Processes of individualization, globalization, a more pluralist culture, a loss of the traditional positions of authority, new relations between the state and society, innovations in communication and information technology, and, more recently, the economic crisis, have created new tasks and problems for the police, demanding changes in the police's work and organization.

Even if these changes may be more or less similar, governments in the different jurisdictions may adopt highly diverse strategies in their response to the problems and challenges. In 2012 in England and Wales, the government, faced with a fiscal crisis, decided on a strategy of considerable budget cuts, reducing the number of police officers and then replacing some officers and civilian police employees by (cheaper and more flexible) private security workers. Parallel to these changes, the government introduced a policy of localization and (local) democratization of the police (Chapter 6). Scotland, on the other hand, although faced with comparable financial and economic problems, chose a very different strategy. Ending what was seen as wasteful duplication of activity across eight semi-autonomous police forces, the Scottish Government introduced a national police force as a way of reducing the scale of the cuts needed in police budgets and allowing the number of police officers to remain at pre-reform levels. In the Netherlands the fiscal and economic problems do not seem to be so very different from those in

Scotland or England and Wales. Just as in Scotland, in 2013 the Netherlands will undergo a transition from a regionalized police system to a national police force. However, despite the serious financial problems, the Dutch government decided that for the next few years the Dutch police will have an even larger budget.

1.2.3 *Power Relations and Networks*

Decisions about police reform depend very much on existing power relations. A shift in these relations may explain why at a certain point there is both an opportunity and a sufficient level of support for police reform, which would not have been possible before. The police reform in England and Wales in 2012, with its localization of the police and the introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners, would not have been possible without the shift in government from New Labour to a coalition of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

Relevant power relations may also be found outside the political domain. Police reform depends on complex policy networks, including representatives not only of the government and the ministries, but also of the police, criminal justice agencies and interest groups (like the police unions). Because these networks are usually opaque and lack transparency, outsiders may find it difficult to understand how they support, transform or resist police reform (Cope, 2002). This may be one reason why it is difficult to obtain accurate information about the role of police leaders in these police reforms. Even if the reform is a political initiative, the police may still be highly influential behind the scenes.

These police policy networks are also relevant to our understanding of the implementation of police reform. After the political decision, the struggle about reform usually continues in these networks. This may be an important reason why the implementation of police reform often takes so much time and why its implementation differs so widely from the original plan.

The police reform may depend greatly on an individual entrepreneur or social movement with the resources, in terms of power or other competencies, to gain support or to eliminate resistance. In the Netherlands the reform of the national police was very dependent on the character of the Minister of Security and Justice. Without his unusual authoritarian, directive style of policing (viewed in the Dutch context), it is likely that the window of opportunity (Kingdon, 1984) for reform would have been closed before the reform was accepted by parliament. By first eliminating the influence of the Ministry of the Interior, he prevented the union of local governments and the mayors' union from obstructing the introduction of a national police force. In Belgium the reform would probably not have been achieved without the White Movement, which symbolized the legitimacy crisis of the Belgian state and emphasized the need for radical police reform.

1.2.4 Changing Views

Shifts in underlying views on the management and organization of the police and police work may also contribute to police reform. Three elements are important here. First, many of these reforms are based on arguments and considerations that are (partially) derived from the NPM (New Public Management) discourse. Many of these reforms are motivated by the wish to promote the three Es (efficiency, economy and effectiveness) within the police. Although Value for Money is still an important argument, in many respects these reforms do not completely follow the NPM logic. They do not contain significant NPM elements, such as the introduction of quasi-markets or the substitution of public police services by private security (the latter being the exception in the case of the reform in England and Wales). In the Netherlands in 2010 the NPM style of performance management of the police was even cut back considerably. France and Belgium seem to be even less influenced by NPM.

Some of these reforms may be better seen as an indication of a post-NPM era. They consist of forms of centralization, often resulting in a national police. Sweden, Denmark, Scotland, the Netherlands, and Finland are some examples here. To a certain degree France has also a process of (further) centralization. This process (which often also includes a tendency towards standardization) contradicts NPM principles such as the use of markets or decentralized (semi-) autonomous units that are accountable for meeting their own performance targets. In some of these countries the introduction of a national police force reflects a tendency to more hierarchical relations in the field of policing and security, which turns back the shift made some 10 years ago from government to governance, and the (re-)introduction of a more powerful central state. As already mentioned, two countries do not share this pattern: England and Wales and Belgium.

Thirdly, to what extent are the similarities in police reforms between some of these countries the result of a policy transfer (Newburn & Sparks, 2004b)? An example of such a process is the conference that the Scottish Government organized in preparation for its police reform, at which representatives of several northern European countries that have national police organizations were invited to exchange views and experiences about their reforms. In other words, to a certain degree there has been a process of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), in which the different countries learnt from each other and perhaps imitated what they perceived elsewhere. However, on the other hand, policymakers and police leaders were not very well informed about the changes in other countries, which may suggest that the similarities in police reform are the outcome of independent processes in these European countries, being influenced only to a minor extent by a process of policy transfer.

1.2.5 *Police Legitimacy*

A loss of legitimacy may also contribute to police reform. In many European countries there has been a long-term decline in police legitimacy, as in England (Reiner, 2010) or the Netherlands (Terpstra & Trommel, 2009). It is not only the loss of citizens' trust that is relevant here, but also the legitimacy of the police as perceived by relevant stakeholders, such as politicians. In Sweden, for example, the politicians felt that the police had failed to deliver improvements in performance despite significant increases in resources. Parallel to the loss of legitimacy there has been, to use a term from Max Weber, a gradual disenchantment with the police: the police have gradually been losing their nature as a 'sacred institution'. The police became a 'normal' and 'worldly' institution. It is now much more difficult for the police to show that they are 'different' and that they have the moral right to independence. In the past the police would be free of certain forms of control that were seen as self-evident in other organizations. Now the police are also confronted with demands for efficiency and effectiveness.

As a result, in some of these countries, politicians no longer see it as self-evident that the police budgets keep on growing (which they have done in the past few decades). This is the more pressing because doubt about the effectiveness of the police seems to be gaining ground. Whereas other public sectors are faced with serious budget cuts, in this new age of austerity in England and Wales the police can no longer hide from such cuts. Although the loss of legitimacy may be comparable, reactions to it may differ. For instance, in the Netherlands this did not translate into budgetary cuts, but into the loss of the police's regional autonomy.

The legitimacy of the police may also come under acute pressure because of some crisis, disaster or scandal. This may be the straw that breaks the camel's back. A combination of both long-term loss of police legitimacy and serious incidents happened in Belgium in the 1990s. This paved the way for the Octopus reform of the Belgian police at the end of the 20th century (Chapter 5).

1.2.6 *Problem Definitions*

Police reforms may be based upon very different problem definitions. These definitions may give a certain direction to and justification for the police reform. In some cases the problem definitions gain persuasive power because of the way they are framed in the political and social debate. Some common elements can be distinguished in these underlying problem definitions. The combination of these elements in the dominant problem definitions may differ from country to country. The first three elements seem to be the most important in the reforms analyzed here. The other four are only to be found in some of the countries and often only have a subsidiary significance.

First, in many countries considerations derived from the NPM discourse are important in the definition of the underlying problems in the existing police system: a lack of economy, effectiveness and efficiency. In some cases the problems are defined as a discrepancy between the growing budgets for the police and continuing doubt about the return on this investment.

Secondly, in some countries the problems are defined as a problem of governance. The police organization is said to have too much autonomy, and as a result it is hard for government to control. As a result, the reform focuses on closer hierarchical control and accountability of the police force(s). For example, in the Netherlands the reform aims to minimize the power of local officials like the mayors and police administrators, replacing that system with a more direct hierarchical control from the top. Similarly, in England and Wales the introduction of PCCs with the power to hire and fire chief constables and with control of the police budget acts as a way of reducing the autonomy of chief police officers and focusing attention on efficiency and effectiveness, illustrating how NPM arguments and the governance definition may be closely related.

Thirdly, the problem may be defined as a discrepancy between the capacities of the police organization and the new demands and challenges made on the police resulting from changes in social, cultural and economic circumstances. In this view the traditional style of management, organization, equipment, scale and resources like the ICT infrastructure are seen as inadequate for the new problems of security and crime in a more open, flexible and mobile society, where traditional boundaries and distances have lost much of their relevance. Based on such a problem definition, the main goals of the reform are to modernize the organization, management and structure of the police to make it fit a more complex, liquid and globalized society.

In addition to these three central elements there are four other elements that are only relevant in a small number of countries. First, the problems of the police may be defined as the absence of a local orientation and local democracy. This problem definition is almost contradictory to the first two elements mentioned. This problem definition, which now dominates in England and Wales, resulted in a reform that attempts to shift the power from the centre to the local or regional level. Another definition concentrates on major internal problems, such as the existing police culture, a lack of professionalism, or an inadequate view of the type of police work that is needed now and in the future. In some countries this problem definition may be presented as a counterweight to an excessive emphasis in the reform on managerial, financial, organizational or structural considerations. This view can become incorporated into the police reform after a while. As result the police reform focuses not only on changing the structure, but also on creating a new police culture, a modernized 'narrative' about the police mandate, a better model of (proper) police work, or improving the professionalism of the police. Some of these elements can be found in the police reforms in Scotland and Belgium, for example.

Finally, the underlying problem definition may have important symbolic aspects. What these elements are may differ from country to country. In case the police reform started as a reaction to a political crisis or some scandal with a lot of media attention, which caused much upheaval and emotion, the police reform may have the symbolic meaning of a measure to prevent new, comparable emotional dramas. This kind of emotion played a major role in the Belgian reform, occurring as it did in the emotional aftermath of the Dutroux case and other comparable dramas that hit Belgium in those years. In Scotland the police reform of 2012 is related to the search for a new national identity. In such a context the decision not to follow the police reform of England and Wales, but to take its own national route to reform, fulfils an important symbolic and emotional need. What is remarkable is that some important elements are almost absent in these problem definitions underlying police reform. This is the case for such important changes of the last few decades as the pluralization of policing and security, the rise of private security, new forms of responsabilization and activation of (groups of) citizens, and the uncertain consequences they may have for the (public) police. This corresponds with the observation mentioned above that the police reforms dealt with here are mainly police-centric and fail to provide an adequate answer to these broader changes in policing and security.

1.3 CONTEXT DEPENDENCY

As has been noted so many times before, police reforms and their underlying drivers and motives, as well as the resulting problems and challenges, depend very much on their specific context (cf. Stenning and Shearing, 2005). However, this context dependency of police reform is much more fundamental and has more far-reaching consequences than is often assumed and imagined. Reform and reform measures that seem to be similar if perceived from a distance prove to have fundamentally divergent meanings in different national contexts and at certain moments. These meanings are often closely related to the often hidden emotional aspects related to police and police work. These emotions refer to specific historical and institutional circumstances that may surprise an outsider, but that are often accepted as a matter of course by members of the national community.

Some significant examples are presented here to illustrate the differences in the meaning of police reform and of a national police force. In Sweden the national police force is primarily associated with the establishment of the national welfare state. The police, like other institutions, became one of the national pillars of this social-democratic achievement. In France, however, the national police force has an almost opposite meaning. Here the national police are still, even after 70 years, associated with the dictatorial, proto-fascist Vichy regime during World War II. As a result, even today the national police have a negative reputation in some segments of the French population.

In the Netherlands, for a long time the notion of a national police also had a negative resonance. It was not so long ago that many observers in this country did not want 'some FBI' or a 'Staatspolizei'. (It is significant that foreign words were used to express this general and deep-rooted aversion.) The recent reform of the Dutch police in the direction of national police force must be understood as a hierarchical reaction to the horizontal 'polder model', with its complex police and implementation networks, which are now often seen as ineffective and as a barrier to necessary innovation. From this perspective, the national police force is presented as a more effective form of organization. In Scotland, as described above, the introduction of a national police has a completely different meaning (although the reform process and new police organization are quite similar to what is happening in the Netherlands). The specific meaning of the introduction of a Scottish national police force is closely related to the search for a new national identity and the construction of new national institutions associated with the political aspiration to greater independence. Some of the specific meanings that the concept of a national police force may have seem to survive for quite a long period of time. This may be seen as another illustration of the importance of continuity and path dependency in police reform, despite the rhetoric of some politicians and police reformers, who may from time to time suggest the opposite.

1.4 THE CHALLENGES OF EVALUATION

How should the types of police reform discussed in this book be evaluated, and what evidence is there that previous reforms have made a differences? These seemingly straightforward questions are in fact extremely difficult to answer. Few of the reforms made to policing considered in this book have been the subject of detailed scrutiny or rigorous evaluation. By contrast, other types of police reform, such as the introduction of a new model of community policing or a new approach to criminal investigation, are typically the focus of detailed analyses that often include assessment of whether and how the intended changes have been implemented ('implementation evaluation'), whether there have been any process improvements resulting from reform ('performance evaluation') and how outputs and outcomes are affected by reform ('output and impact evaluation'). Major structural reforms in policing have not received the same attention from the research community. Nor is this just a feature of policing. As Braithwaite *et al.* (2005) observe in relation to health services where restructuring in the form of mergers and reconfiguring of the responsibilities of central and local bodies is seemingly pervasive, "The evidence for [restructuring] making a difference, let alone demonstrably improving productivity or outcomes, is surprisingly slender. [...] In truth, there are no randomized trials, no longitudinal studies of multiple restructuring events or time series designs and little scientifically acceptable cross-sectional work".

The absence of detailed evaluation is perhaps not surprising given that any large-scale police reform has a very complex architecture that confronts the would-be evaluator with significant methodological and practical problems (see also Wollmann, 2003). First, there is the problem that the types of police reform discussed in this volume have multiple and interconnected objectives. Reform is frequently linked to financial savings and efficiency, effectiveness and improved performance, and to visions of greater engagement with communities and enhanced levels of accountability. In Denmark, for example, the stated aims of the reform included creating the ‘the best – and the most – police for the money’ and establishing an open and accessible police service with short response times, a focus on crime prevention and the capacity for effective investigation (see Chapter 3). Moreover, these are just the stated aims of reform. When unstated aims are also added into the picture (which might include the role of police reform in challenging the power of chief police officers or as part of a wider agenda concerned with developing a welfare state as in Sweden or nation-building as in Scotland), then the challenge of evaluating police reform becomes even more formidable. Furthermore, even when specific goals and objectives have been identified it might still be difficult to translate these into measurable indicators.

A second problem concerns the challenge of establishing a robust research design for any evaluation. Some forms of evaluation, such as those that resemble a randomized clinical trial with ‘control’ and ‘experimental groups’, are impossible with these types of reform. Even a more straightforward ‘before-and-after study’ is highly problematic. It requires reliable empirical data on which the reform is going to be judged before reform happens, and equally reliable data after the reform has been implemented. Ideally, data on what the state of the world would have been if no reform had taken place and the pre-existing system had continued is also required if a rigorous assessment of the impact of reform is to be achieved and complex relationships of causality disentangled. Again none of the reforms discussed in this book have been subject to this kind of scrutiny. Instead, what exists tends to be largely ad hoc evidence derived from a mix of ‘ex-ante’ evaluations involving some form of assessment of alternative courses of policy direction before reform occurs, and some ex-post ‘quasi-evaluations’ that focus on description rather than explanation and involve processes of data gathering that track the changes occurring during reform and promote a gradual learning process that feeds back information to policymakers. In Scotland, the Sustainable Policing Project exemplifies the ex-ante evaluation given that it attempted to evaluate the three options for the future of policing that the government was considering (enhanced collaboration between the existing eight forces, a regional structure of three or four forces, and a national force). Each option was considered in terms of what it would mean for the functional organization of policing and what the potential financial savings would be of the different options (see Chapter 7).

Denmark provides a good (and at present the only) example of an ex-post 'quasi-evaluation' where a longitudinal analysis of changes in citizen perceptions of policing, the views of partner organizations, and changes in police performance measured by detection rates and response times were gathered over a four-year period beginning with the initiation of the reform programme (see Chapter 3). These two examples also illustrate another important distinction with regard to evaluation: whether this is carried out by independent external bodies such as academic institutions, as happened in Denmark, or internally by governments and police, as was the case with the Sustainable Policing Project in Scotland. Indeed, there is a politics to evaluation that needs to be recognized in terms of who conducts and takes responsibility for any evaluation, what questions are addressed and how the work is commissioned and funded. The absence of detailed independent evaluations of police reform programmes highlighted in this volume is perhaps indicative of nervousness within governments and the police to open up reform to detailed independent scrutiny once the decision has been taken.

A third challenge is ensuring that the research agenda around evaluation of police reform is sufficiently broad to capture intended and unintended consequences and the substantive and symbolic aspects of reform. Where there have been attempts to evaluate police reform in a systematic way (as in Denmark and Finland) these tend to be quite rationalist in character, using conventional tools such as cost-benefit analysis, quasi experiments, and benchmarking. The limitation of such approaches is that they overlook the symbolic and rhetorical significance of reform. It might be that for some politicians, for example, it is the symbolic dimensions of reform that are of key importance in terms of reconfiguring the distribution of power between police and elected representatives, while other stakeholders may be more focused on whether the reforms have achieved their economic goals in terms of saving money or their effectiveness goals in terms of contributing to reductions in levels of crime.

1.5 THE CHAPTERS OF THE BOOK¹

The following chapters of the book are arranged as country case studies and have been divided into two broad groups. The first group of countries – France, Denmark, Finland and Belgium – have all undergone significant police reforms in the recent past and in some cases (notably Denmark) have also

1. Many of the papers in this book were first presented at a session on police reform at the European Society of Criminology (ESC) conference in Vilnius in 2011, organized by the ESC Policing Working Group. Further discussions and presentations around the theme of police reform were then held at the European Police Research Institutes Collaboration (EPIC) conference in Uppsala 2012.

evaluated some of the impacts and implications of reform. The second group of countries – England and Wales, Scotland, the Netherlands and Sweden – are all at an earlier stage of implementing major structural reforms, and therefore the focus of these chapters is more on the processes rather than the consequences of reform.

Given that *France* (Chapter 2) has been described as possessing “the largest continuous system of policing and the most developed police tradition in Europe” (Bowden, 1978: 140; see also Emsley, 1983), it might be considered an appropriate country with which to begin this collection. In terms of significant police reform, however, the key development was, as Christian Mouhanna observes, that which in 1941 brought about the establishment of a National Police based on a very centralized, top-down model of decision making whose priority has always been to serve the state rather than its citizens. Although there have been several attempts to address the resulting estrangement between the police and the citizens (by, for example, experimenting with forms of community policing), the 1941 system still prevails, and most reforms have resulted in ‘more of the same’ in terms of ever greater centralization of policing. As Mouhanna argues, the reason why there have not been any fundamental changes stems largely from a French political model that entrusts the state with wide-ranging responsibilities in multiple domains, and there is therefore strong resistance to anything that might erode national authority over policing. Indeed, in 2009 the National Police and the National Gendarmerie were reunited under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, while processes of reconfiguring local police boundaries to create ‘mega-districts’ have further encouraged centralization, typically facilitated by the imposition of central planning and performance targets set in Paris.

The processes of geographical restructuring that have created larger territorial policing units at a local level in France have also been at the centre of the programmes of police reform in Denmark in 2007 and Finland in 2009. In *Denmark* (Chapter 3), police reform originated with a Vision Committee established by the government with a focus on establishing an open and accessible police service working in partnership with local stakeholders and with improved levels of performance in terms of shorter response times, proactive crime prevention and the capacity for effective criminal investigation. To achieve these multiple objectives, the main recommendation was the merger of the existing 54 police districts to create twelve much larger districts. The rationale for this change was that it would both increase the capacity of local areas to deliver a full range of policing functions and bring about greater decentralization because it would empower district commissioners to take local decisions about resource allocation. Drawing on a detailed longitudinal analysis of the impacts and implications of these reforms, Holmberg and Balvig conclude that not only did local police performance decline significantly in the early years after the reforms were introduced, but the claims around decentralization have proved illusory. The new chain of command subordinates local police commissioners

to the National Police Commissioner and ultimately the Minister of Justice, while detailed performance contracts facilitate centralized governance of the police.

In *Finland* (Chapter 4), police reform has followed a similar trajectory to that in Denmark in terms of a process of administrative restructuring that has reduced the number of police districts from over 200 prior to the 1996 reform, first down to 90 and then, following further reforms in 2009/2010, further down to 24. The context for these changes in Finland, however, is rather different from that in Denmark. They have largely been driven by a need to address a declining police budget and are underpinned by a commitment to the principles of New Public Management with a greater focus on increasing efficiency, developing a performance culture, and improving the quality of service for the public. As Haraholma and Houtsonen indicate, however, this reform programme raises a range of important questions: can a similar administrative structure work across the very different operational environments that exist in Finland? What happens to local autonomy when a 'management-by-results' approach is introduced at a national level? And is there a danger, as was experienced in Denmark, that local knowledge and local cultural understandings will be lost after the introduction of a more centralized policing system? While their chapter does not answer all these questions, it does show that while there were no significant changes in citizen perceptions of policing in Finland, the reforms were viewed more positively at senior levels within the Finnish police than they were at the grass-roots level. Moreover, the reforms did not result in the anticipated financial savings that were a key initial rationale for introducing them.

The policing of *Belgium* is the focus of Chapter 5 and has historically owed much to French influence because of the French occupation of the country between 1795 and 1815. The French established both the local municipalities, each of which has its own police force, and the gendarmerie, which operate at a national level and which are the main force for maintaining public order. A third police force, the judicial police at the public prosecutors office, was set up in 1919 and is focused on the investigation of crime. In contrast to France, however, Belgium has witnessed a period of fundamental reform to its structure of policing with legislation in 1998 leading to the creation of 'a single integrated police force, structure on two levels' (the federal level and the supra-local level of inter-policing zones that cluster together the 589 municipalities into 195 areas). As Devroe and Ponsaers describe in this chapter, the key driver of this reform programme was a series of crises and scandals within the Belgium police that led to the establishment of a commission of enquiry. Evaluation of the reform 10 years after the legislation has, however, highlighted the need for further reform in order to establish a degree of equilibrium between, on the one hand, central control and a uniformity of approach, and, on the other hand, the need for local autonomy in order to address local problems.

The next four chapters focus on countries that are at the very early stages of fundamental reforms, where the process of implementation has either only just started or is yet to begin. In *England and Wales* (which is discussed in Chapter 6) the coalition government of Conservative and Liberal Democrats that came to power in 2010 has embarked on an unprecedented programme of police reform, but unlike many of the other countries discussed in this volume, reform does not entail a reconfiguration of the territorial structure of policing. Indeed, the coalition government remains strongly committed to retaining the structure of 43 largely autonomous regional police forces. Instead it has focused its attention on a radical change to police governance. To halt the drift towards what has been perceived as a centralization of policing caused largely by government performance targets, locally elected PCCs have been introduced into all police forces outside London. Informed largely by the US experience of direct democracy, PCCs are accountable to the local electorate and have responsibility to appoint and dismiss the local police chief, as well as control of the police budget. As Loveday illustrates, however, the government's enthusiasm for PCCs has not been shared by the public with voter turnout averaging just 15%. In parallel with the introduction of PCCs, the government is also creating a new National Crime Agency to tackle serious and organized crime, which will allow local police forces to focus largely on community priorities. Other elements of the reform programme include encouraging police forces to engage in partnerships with the private sector around the outsourcing of administrative police functions, such as the running of custody facilities and the management of human resources and finance. The hope is that this will allow forces to make the required savings in their budgets without having to make significant reductions in frontline policing.

The trajectory of reform in England and Wales is all the more interesting because it diverges so markedly from the experience of *Scotland*, which is discussed by Fyfe and Scott in Chapter 7. Faced with having to make significant cuts to public spending, the Scottish Government has merged the eight regional police forces to create a national police service, which begins operation on 1 April 2013. In addition, a new structure of police governance has been established that ends the long tradition of locally elected representatives playing a role in appointing local chief police officers and local government contributing half the cost of policing. Instead, a national police authority has been established with members selected rather than elected. Another interesting dimension to the police reform programme in Scotland is the opportunity it has provided the government to articulate a new set of 'principles of policing' within the Police Reform Act. Within this narrative, a focus on crime and disorder is subsumed within a broader statement of the policing mission as aiming to 'improve safety and well-being of persons, localities and communities', and this is to be achieved in a way that engages with communities and promotes measures to prevent crime, harm and disorder. This is an important shift in

emphasis away from a crime-centred definition of the purpose of policing and also stands in marked contrast to the view articulated in England and Wales that the police focus must be crime reduction. "The mission of the police", the Home Secretary contends, "which was established by Sir Robert Peel as preventing crime and disorder has not fundamentally changed" (Home Office, 2010: 2).

There are several close parallels between the reform programme in Scotland and that in the *Netherlands*, discussed in Chapter 8. Both countries have experienced many years of 'creeping centralization', and both are now replacing a regionalized structure with a national police force. As Terpstra explains, however, such a radical change to the policing of the Netherlands would have been hard to imagine until very recently given the strong Dutch political tradition of decentralization. In the case of policing, however, several different elements have come together to reshape thinking in this field such that a national police has come to be seen as a politically attractive solution to many of the problems that the police currently face. For example, in tackling organized crime a national structure is viewed as much more effective than a fragmented approach based on 25 semi-autonomous forces. The resistance of regional police chiefs to moves toward a national structure has also significantly weakened in recent years, partly because of the failure of high-profile ICT projects designed to facilitate greater cooperation between the different forces, but also because once the politicians appeared committed to a national force, particularly the new Minister of Justice appointed in 2010, senior officers began to accept that change would be inevitable. As Terpstra highlights, however, the creation of a national force raises some important questions for the future. It is likely to lead to a loss of local democratic control of policing, and it is unclear whether it will be the hoped for panacea in relation to ICT problems and the drive to reduce bureaucracy. Of perhaps greatest concern is that a long tradition of checks and balances that have characterized the governance of policing in the Netherlands will largely disappear and power will increasingly be concentrated at the national level.

The last of the country case studies focuses on *Sweden* (Chapter 9), and as Wennström notes, the current proposal by a Parliamentary committee to replace the 21 police authorities with a single police organization (what the Swedes term a mono-agency) is the latest chapter in a long history of debates around police reform in Sweden. Since the early 1920s there have been more than 100 investigations into the nature and structure of policing in Sweden, and initially the focus was on whether the police should be municipal or national, leading to a decision in 1965 to the police being nationalized in the context of the wider development of the welfare state in Sweden. Subsequent inquiries into policing have focused more on issues of police effectiveness, partly in terms of tackling crime, but also in relation to citizen engagement because of concerns about police visibility and levels of service. The proposal

now to make policing a mono-agency by 2015, led by a single chief officer accountable directly to the government, has been prompted in part by political frustration that the provision of additional police resources has not been matched by improving performance as well as by a series of high-profile police blunders (including the botched investigation into the murder of the Prime Minister Olaf Palme in 1986 and the riots at the 2001 EU summit in Gothenburg). As Wennström observes, however, change is not the same as improvement, and Sweden appears to be locked into a cycle of police reform in which problems are identified, reforms are implemented but are often flawed, so new reforms are required.

A key reason why macro-level police reforms are so often flawed is explored in the final chapter (10) by Tops and Spelier. In their analysis of 'The Police as a Frontline Organization' they note that the kinds of top-down reform examined in the case studies in this book typically pay insufficient attention to the professional discretion exercised by police officers at street-level and the situational and embedded nature of routine police work. By underestimating the highly distinctive frontline characteristics of police organizations, which include the way in which street-level police activities are typically complex, often involve conflict and are ethically loaded, there is a high risk of a disabling disconnection between macro-level reform and micro-level practice. A pre-condition for successful police reform, Tops and Spelier conclude, is a clear focus on the specific conditions of police work as a frontline activity in which street-level officers feel supported by their managers, they feel their working conditions are acceptable, and they have a clear understanding of the wider purpose of their work.

1.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the beginning of this chapter we highlighted the fact that there is a long tradition of claims regarding the transformation of policing and of radical change in systems of crime control. While we do not want to fall into the trap of overexaggerating the degree of change, the reforms to the structure and organization of public police institutions discussed in the following chapters clearly demonstrate significant attempts by government at large-scale and comprehensive police reform. Furthermore, while there are some important similarities and degrees of convergence in the types of reform being implemented in many of the countries examined in this book, there are also important differences and divergences that need to be recognized. The question mark that appears in the title of this volume is quite deliberate: not all police forces are being centralized and even for those that are, the nature, meaning and processes of centralization may be experienced very differently across jurisdictions. The caveats that are normally applied in discussions of globalization in relation to policing are just as relevant to considerations of centralization, namely that "police

policies, legal systems, organizations and cultures continue to be national entities, bound to national traditions and circumstances" (Verhage *et al.*, 2010: 9). In addition, while some of the chapters in this book do illustrate a degree of at least 'lesson learning' if not 'policy transfer' between particular countries, it is important to acknowledge that the reform of policing, like policy making more generally, rarely follows the neat logical stages of a rational choice model, but is messy, contingent, and often the product of compromises and political expediency (Newburn & Sparks, 2004a: 12). This book, then, is very much a starting point in understanding and thinking about the nature of contemporary police reform in northern and western Europe and lays the foundations for future comparative analysis. It provides a snap shot of a remarkably dynamic policing landscape in which lots of questions remain to be answered regarding the implementation, impact and implications of reform and, in particular, whether these changes achieve their intended goals.

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